



**Testimony  
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Executive Director  
Connecticut Council of Small Towns  
Before the Appropriations Committee  
March 27, 2015**

The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) **strongly supports H.J. No. 19 RESOLUTION REQUIRING A TWO-THIRDS VOTE TO APPROVE MANDATES TO MUNICIPALITIES AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS.**

Given the difficult budgetary challenges facing our towns and cities, it is more important than ever that Connecticut adopt meaningful mandate relief this session. Unfortunately, despite widespread recognition that unfunded mandates drive up local budgets and property taxes, there are only a handful of mandate relief measures currently under consideration this session. There are, however, several bills pending before the legislature which would impose new unfunded mandates on municipalities – many with hefty price tags.

By requiring any new unfunded mandate to be approved by a 2/3 vote of the General Assembly, HJ-19 will shine a spotlight on the costs of any proposed mandate on our towns and cities. It will also help ensure that lawmakers have the opportunity to carefully weigh the costs and benefits of a proposal and determine whether there are any ways of mitigating or funding those costs to alleviate the burden on our municipalities. If, however, the legislature determines that a bill is a significant priority, HJ-19 will allow adoption by a 2/3 vote.

Too often, the actual fiscal impact of a mandate is unclear until legislation is adopted and towns are faced with implementing the requirements. Due to the short timeframe for scheduling a public hearing following the publication of legislation, it is often difficult for municipalities to fully assess the costs associated with a proposal to include in testimony provided on the record. Although Connecticut requires fiscal notes to identify any municipal impact, this is done after a bill has been approved by the committee and is moving forward in the process.

Also, many bills are amended in committee or on the floor in ways that may increase municipal costs. Although fiscal notes are prepared on such amendments, there is little opportunity for municipalities to provide input on actual implementation costs at this point in the process.

Other states have adopted similar provisions which have helped highlight concerns regarding the escalating costs associated with new or expanded unfunded mandates, including Florida, Louisiana and New Jersey. (*Fla. Const. art. VII, § 18, La. Const. art. VI, § 14, N.J. Const. art. VIII, § 2, ¶ 5*)

We urge lawmakers to approve HJ-19 to provide towns and cities with some relief from the crushing burden of unfunded state mandates. Thank you for the opportunity to comment in support of the need for mandate relief.

*COST is an advocacy organization committed to giving small towns a strong voice in the legislative process. Its members are Connecticut towns with populations of less than 30,000. COST champions the major policy needs and concerns of Connecticut's suburban and rural towns.*